

WESTERN LAND & IMPROVEMENT CO. DOUBLE HOUSES  
South Fifth and Sixth Streets  
Jeannette  
Westmoreland County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6090

HABS  
PA  
65-JEAN,  
75-

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
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ADDENDUM TO:  
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HOUSES  
(WL&IC Double Houses)  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### WESTERN LAND & IMPROVEMENT COMPANY DOUBLE HOUSES (WL&IC Double Houses)

HABS No. PA-6090

- LOCATION:** South Fifth & Sixth streets, Jeannette, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania
- SIGNIFICANCE:** A high concentration of window, tableware, bottle and specialty glass plants distinguished Jeannette as "The Glass City" early in its history. Significant housing stock consists of company-built row and detached double houses, and several privately constructed dwellings.

#### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The brick double and row houses along South Fifth and Sixth streets that make up the Western Land & Improvement Company holdings are a uniquely formal arrangement of urban vernacular housing in Jeannette (see also HABS No. PA-6091, Western Land & Improvement Company Rowhouses). Built by the development company responsible for Jeannette's town plan, the houses extend south of the main artery of Clay Avenue and lie between the two H. Sellers McKee plats of lots that make up the rest of the study area. There were originally 160 brick dwelling units: forty, two-story double houses for a total of eighty units, and four groups of twenty, two-story row houses for an additional eighty dwellings.

The first sales of double houses were recorded in October and November 1889, and in December, McDonough Feree purchased an entire side of the block on South Fifth Street, Nos. 301-27. Feree had owned a farm on the north side of Jeanette, which he had sold to a speculator for subdivision into lots, and he was probably reinvesting his profits here. Selling in such large groups was not typical, other double houses were sold off more gradually. Between 1889 and 1906, the year that local investors took over the Western Land & Improvement Company, approximately thirty real estate transactions involving at least one-half of a double house were recorded, and only five of those transactions appear to be multiple. Tax records for 1910 show that the development company still held thirty-two double house units (halves), meaning forty-eight had been sold. The same year, census records indicate that only seventeen households in the double house units owned their own homes.

Additions by the property owners have figured significantly into the character of the neighborhood. Sanborn maps provide a progressive plan view of this process of adaptation at work. A single addition appears on the 1891 maps. Located to the rear of

214 South Fifth Street, the addition is labeled “saloon.” This addition was just the first in a series of conversions along this block. All of the double houses in the 200 block of South Fifth Street were either remodeled into businesses or torn down to make way for other uses. By the mid-1890s, two entire double houses had become hotels, the Hotel Jeannette and the Imperial, and a series of individual additions show to the rear of several more halves. These additions are generally rooms added to the side of the ell, though some are just covered rear porches. Since the halves often differ, the additions appear to have been built separately onto each. This can also indicate individual ownership or control of the dwelling unit. The double houses bought as a group along South Sixth Street and used as income property have no such alterations until much later.

By 1900, fourteen halves had been expanded, and in 1905, when nearly half of owners had changed their dwelling units in some way, the first full-width front porches show up on the maps. In 1910, only a handful of double houses had not been enlarged to the rear, and many had undergone two or three phases of alterations. By the mid-1910s, less than thirty years after the double houses were built, only a single dwelling unit retained its original footprint. The front porch additions, a distinctive and gracious feature along the streets today, were a later but no less pervasive series of alterations. By 1925, all but eighteen of the eighty dwellings had a full-width porch to the street. Only a few of the remaining double houses now have a porch or enclosed front addition.

Though the particular additions were built at different times, most conform to a few standard typologies. Several factors probably account for this. The families living in the double houses, or their landlords, had similar expectations when adding onto the units, either to create a larger kitchen, dining room, or parlor on the ground floor, or to add additional bedrooms above. Indoor bathrooms also had to be incorporated into the dwellings at some point, and this was most easily done on the second floor in the rear ell above the kitchen. The configuration of the double houses and their lots also limited the number of ways the buildings could reasonably be expanded. Three standard addition typologies, besides the full-width front porches, are evident and can be conveniently referred to as rear porches, rear extensions, and rear/side extensions.

Rear porches are typical porch additions to the side of the ell. Although today all of the rear porches are enclosed or have enclosed space above them, at first many were open. Rear extensions are those additions built onto the side of the ell out to the width of the front brick block. Additions that extend even further to the side, beyond the side of the front block, will be referred to as rear/side extensions.

Over time, most of the rear and rear/side extensions have been built-out to a full two stories, but when the first additions were built, they were often only one story high. Beyond these standard typologies, it should be noted that several dwelling units also have a room added beyond the ell.

Selected examples of the double houses illustrate the standard addition typologies, and in the latter cases, give an idea of the ownership patterns for the buildings and the residents

in this portion of the study area. Perhaps the least altered pair of double house units in terms of form are Nos. 309-11 South Sixth Street. Though the finish materials at the ell are modern, and the windows have been reconfigured, the basic outlines of the building remain intact. The rear view shows small porches that were added to the original structure before 1910 and were later enclosed. Rear porches were often the first in a series of alterations, but here no further additions were ever built.

Many of the double house units were converted to commercial uses at various times. This happened both by chance and by design. Several whole double houses along South Fifth Street were eventually converted to hotels and other businesses. Other units, mainly block-end units abutting Bullitt and Chambers avenues, were used alternately for shops and residences. These end units were designed with wider plans, a nearly full-height front window and an addition side door, probably to accommodate just such conversion to commercial use. Sanborn maps show that businesses were operating at these locations very early, with stores or offices listed at three of the eleven end units in 1891.

The design differences at the end units are most easily seen at 326 South Fifth Street, one of the dwelling units that does not have a front porch (see HABS No. PA-5950). As is the case here, most of the side doors have been bricked-in, but the door outline is still visible at the front corner. This particular dwelling unit does not appear to have ever been used as a business; rather, it appears to have been enlarged and remodeled into apartments. One double house unit that was used as a corner store for many years was 300-2 South Sixth Street (see HABS No. PA-6132). A loading hook still protrudes from the second floor along Bullitt Avenue. This end unit was at first residential, but it was converted to a butcher shop before 1895. By 1900, most of the rear yard had been built over, and the map notes a portion of the rear structure was a sausage factory. In 1905, the sausage factory moved to a building in the rear yard of No. 302, which was still being used as a residence. In both 1910 and 1916, the adjacent factory building was not being used, but the meat market was still in business on the corner. Although a front addition appears on the building in 1910, it was later removed. The present front extension dates from after 1925.

The meat market was the business of German immigrant Louis Bauer. The 1900 census manuscripts list the Bauers: Louis, his wife Louisa, son Louis Jr. and daughter Louisa, at both addresses, which probably means they were living adjacent to the store at No. 302. A single man boarded with the family, and another couple is also listed at No. 302. Louis Bauer is shown as the owner of the property in the census, but deed records indicate he took title Nos. 300-02 in 1903. The Bauers also purchased the neighboring double house, Nos. 304-06 South Sixth Street in 1907. The elder Bauers and their son were living at No. 302 in 1910. No listing appears for No. 300 that year, so it was probably just used for the business. In the late 1920s, the meat and grocery store was still in business, apparently under Louis Jr., but the Bauers had also built an apartment building across the rear yards of both of the double houses they owned. After forty years, the market probably closed when the double houses and apartments were sold to local confectioners George and Peter Drossinos in 1932.

### PART III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The double houses are closest to Clay Avenue in the 200 and 300 blocks of both Fifth and Sixth streets. The original houses consisted of a two-story, four-bay by three-bay rectangular brick block with half-width, wood-frame ells to the rear of each unit. Each half is set on a lot 24' x 100', except for the end units where the side yard is eliminated and the lot is only 20' wide. The main block of the houses, each half of which measures 16' x 28', is brick bearing wall construction on stone foundations. Floor loads are carried to the side walls, which are of rougher brick construction, while the front wall, which is supporting only its own weight, is made of a finer brick laid in a running bond. The wood-frame rear extensions are also set on stone foundations, though a wood-frame support wall divides the two cellars from each other below the ells. The original ells for each half were approximately 10' wide x 12' deep.

Decorative treatments on the double houses include stone sills, corbelled-brick center and side brackets, a corbelled-brick dentil and band pattern at the top of the front façade, and a pressed-metal cornice. The decorative cornice treatment continues down the side wall at houses along cross-streets, otherwise simple wood trim tops the side parapets. The original exterior finish on the rear ells was narrow, horizontal wood siding. Aside from additional cornice trim and the lack of a side yard, the end units were also distinctive in being 4' wider in plan (20'), and for having a full-height front window and an extra side door onto the cross street. All of the houses were initially provided with just a simple wood stair at each entry. The houses were originally six rooms: a parlor, chamber/dining room, and kitchen on the ground floor, with three bedrooms above.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

*Insurance Maps of Jeannette, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania.* New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1891, 1895, 1900, 1905, 1910, 1916, 1925, 1950.

Deed Books. Recorder of Deeds, Westmoreland County Courthouse, Greensburg, Pennsylvania, 358/334, 413/362, 542/179, 695/276, 923/217.

Will Books. Westmoreland County Courthouse, Greensburg, Pennsylvania, 18/202.

City Directories, 1897, 1913, 1923, 1928, 1948, 1960.

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 1900, 1910 census manuscripts on microfilm.

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

In February 1987, the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) and the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) began a multi-year historical and architectural documentation project in southwestern Pennsylvania. Carried out in conjunction with America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), HABS and HAER undertook a comprehensive documentation of Jeannette, documenting industries, housing and cultural institutions.

#### PART V. RELATED INFORMATION

For examples of double houses within the study are, see HABS No. PA-6130, 309-11 South Fifth Street (Double House) and HABS No. PA-6133, 312-314 South Sixth Street (Double House).